

The 10-Minute Core-Blasting Pilates Workout

PIN IT

At first glance, a Pilates studio might look like a medieval torture chamber, with strange straps and metal springs hanging from padded platforms called a “reformer.” In reality, Pilates is a form of exercise that aims to develop flexibility, good posture, strength, and balance all at the same time. Eight-week traditional mat Pilates training-program effects on adult fitness characteristics. Rogers K, Gibson AL. Research quarterly for exercise and sport, 2010, Aug.;80(3):0270-1367.”>Trusted Source

In the early 20th century, Joseph Pilates invented the series of movements to help English veterans recover from injuries sustained during World War I. Since then, Pilates has been the go-to regimen for anyone interested in working on strength, grace, and of course, a solid core.

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While some Pilates classes utilize special machines, mat sequences only require your bodyweight, so they’re easy to replicate at home and still reap the same benefits. Pilates for improvement of muscle endurance, flexibility,

balance, and posture. Kloubec JA. Journal of strength and conditioning research / National Strength & Conditioning Association, 2010, May.;24(3):1533-4287.”>Trusted Source

We asked [Sarah Ruback](#) of [Core Pilates NYC](#) to pick some of the best moves for core strength. The focus here is quality, not quantity, so make each rep as strong as possible and don't stress about the number of reps. (For further instruction, check out CorePilates's series of [demo videos](#).)

How to Use This List

Learn the core-blasting moves below then put them into action with the 10-minute workout at the end of the list. More of a Pilates pro than a beginner? Simply perform each movement longer than the prescribed time. Moving slowly and focusing on correct form can help even advanced people feel the burn in every muscle. For an added challenge, Ruback suggests holding 1 to 2 pound dumbbells (water bottles or soup cans also work well).

1. Pilates Curl



Lie faceup with knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and arms at sides. Exhale, curling chin to chest and bringing shoulders completely off mat. Hold for 1 breath, then lower back down slowly. Lift from breastbone to engage abs and avoid crunching neck.

2. The Hundred



Lie faceup and bring knees in toward chest. Lift head, neck, and shoulders off mat and stretch hands by sides with palms facing floor. Extend legs to a 45-degree angle with heels together and toes apart (the Pilates stance). Pump arms up and down while breathing in and out through the nose for 5 counts each. Repeat for 10 sets.

3. Roll-Up



Lie faceup with arms extended toward ceiling. Exhale, curl chin to chest, and roll up to sitting position with arms reaching toward feet. Exhale and reverse to roll down one vertebrae at a time. Move slowly and smoothly with no forward lunging or jerking.

4. Rolling Like a Ball



Sit on mat with knees drawn toward chest and arms wrapped around legs. Rock back to tailbone with feet hovering a few inches above mat. Inhale, rolling back to shoulder blades then exhale to roll forward to balanced starting position. Use abs to control momentum and pause before feet touch mat.

5. Single-Leg Stretch



Lie faceup on mat with knees drawn toward chest, shins parallel to floor in tabletop position. Exhale to lift head, neck, and shoulders off mat. At the same time, extend left leg straight to a 45-degree angle and draw right knee toward chest. Grab right knee with left hand and right ankle with right hand. Switch legs on the inhale, pulse for 1 beat, and switch legs again on exhale, keeping shoulders off mat and core engaged throughout.

6. Double-Leg Stretch



Lie faceup on mat. Lift head, neck, and shoulders and bring knees to chest, arms hugging shins. Inhale, and straighten legs to a 45-degree angle while simultaneously extending arms along ears. Exhale, and circle arms down to hug shins as you return to starting position. Keep shoulders off mat throughout and maintain even breathing.

7. Single Straight-Leg Stretch



Lie faceup on mat with legs extended straight up, perpendicular to floor. Lift head, neck, and shoulders off mat and bring right leg in as close to face as flexibility allows, lightly holding right calf with both hands. Pulse right leg toward face 2 times while left leg extends away from body and hovers above mat, then repeat on the other side.

8. Crisscross



Lie faceup on mat, hands behind neck and elbows wide. Lift head, neck, and shoulders off mat. Bring left armpit to right knee and extend left leg to high diagonal. Twist to the other side and switch legs, bringing right armpit to left knee and extending right leg.

9. Double Straight-Leg Stretch



Lie faceup on mat with hands supporting back of neck and knees bent toward chest. Exhale, bringing upper torso off mat and extending legs toward ceiling. Lower legs to a 45-degree angle for 3 counts then lift again for 1 count.

10. Teaser II



Lie faceup and hug knees to chest. Reach arms directly overhead and extend both legs to high diagonal. Stretch arms back toward ears then shift them toward toes, rolling up to a seated V position. Keep arms and legs at a 45-degree angle to mat. From this position, lower and raise legs for 3 to 5 reps. Roll spine to mat one vertebrae at a time, then lower legs to return to starting position.

11. Pilates Plank to Push-Up



Stand tall, exhale, and round chin to chest, rolling the body down to a “rag doll” position. Walk hands out into a high plank position. Lower body halfway to mat, elbows tucked close to ribcage. Straighten arms to press up and repeat the Pilates push-up for 3 to 5 reps. Walk hands toward feet and roll back up to starting position.

12. Shoulder Bridge



Lie faceup with knees bent, feet flat on mat, arms along sides. Exhale and roll hips off mat toward ceiling. Holding this position, extend right leg and kick it to ceiling with pointed toe. Flex right heel and lower leg to level of left knee. Do 3 reps, then place right foot on mat. Extend left leg and repeat on the other side, then roll hips down to mat to return to starting position.

13. Double-Leg Kick



Lie facedown with right cheek on mat. Place hands on low back, one on top of another, palms facing up. Allow elbows to fall toward mat. Kick both heels to glutes 2 to 3 times. Straighten legs, keeping feet off floor, then extend clasped hands toward feet and lift chest off mat, gazing straight ahead. (You should feel no pressure in low back.) Lower chest to mat, and turn head to other side to repeat.

GREATIST

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Pilates Curl



The Hundred



Roll-Up



Rolling Like a Ball



Single-Leg Stretch



Double-Leg Stretch



Single Straight- Leg Stretch



Crisscross



Double Straight- Leg Stretch



Teaser II



Pilates Plank to Push-Up



Special thanks to Core Pilates NYC instructor Sarah Ruback for creating the workout for this article. And special thanks to Molly Ritterbeck, Greatist editor, for modeling the moves seen here. Molly wears her own Brooks tank and H&M tights.